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Scan's regular Research columns feature is refereed by Dr Ross J. Todd, Associate Professor, School of Communication, Information and Library Studies at Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey. Research columns continues to build a value for research as a process, strengthening the theoretical basis for the practice of teacher-librarianship. It gives particular emphasis to demonstrating how research can inform practice through the application of findings, questioning of assumptions, and identification and analysis of practical problems. This issue is the first part of a two part article reflecting on the nature of collaborations between teacher-librarians and teachers. Discussion includes a focus on the action research cycle as an important tool and '...a key educational framework for collaborative partnerships...'

Teacher-librarians and the leading of learning



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Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. In Australia, for example, Victoria's *Principles of Learning and Teaching* initiative and Queensland's *New Basics / Productive Pedagogies* initiative reflect a similar intent. The New South Wales *Quality Teaching* initiative centres on a three dimensional model of pedagogy, embracing the development of high levels of Intellectual quality, promoting a Quality learning environment, and developing and making explicit to students the Significance of their work. Such initiatives provide a philosophical and a professional basis for developing classroom practices that foster high quality learning outcomes.

Underpinning these initiatives are not just concerns about teacher effectiveness per se, but an acknowledgement that learning is complex, and that the teacher is the most important element influencing conceptual development and change, and attitudes and values of students (Goodrum, Hackling & Rennie 2001). Also underpinning this is a philosophy of educational leadership that explicitly focuses on the leading of learning and the transformative role of learning, rather than on role, authority or position centered conceptions of leadership (Oyinlade, Gellhaus & Darboe 2003; Frost & Durrant 2003; Lambert 2003). Lambert, for example, speaks of the

'...sacred alliance among teaching, learning and leading' to create a productive and supportive learning environment that is responsive to students' backgrounds, diverse needs and interests (Lambert 2003, p. 425). Frost & Durrant (2003) further identify three critical dimensions to the leading of learning: collaboration and partnerships; experimenting with practice; and gathering and using evidence, founded on a framework support that involves reflection and critical discourse, planning and strategic action about learning, rather than the micro-political tensions of professional authority and support (Frost & Durrant 2003, pp.175-176).

Teacher-librarians are not isolated from, nor immune to, these initiatives. The literature of school librarianship increasingly focuses on the school library's contribution to student learning outcomes, the critical importance of evidence based practice as an issue and direction for the field, and the need for teacher-librarians to address more carefully the dynamics of instructional intervention and the nature of collaborations through the school library and their relationships to learning outcomes. Accordingly, this paper examines the three dimensions identified by Frost & Durrant (2003): collaboration; reflective action; and learning outcomes,

Across the globe, an increased focus on understanding the dynamics of school reform and its implementation have centered on improving the quality of teaching, assessment and learning outcomes. In a context of continuous school improvement and clear calls for schools to create more productive learning cultures, increased engagement of students, the aspects of teacher pedagogy and teacher effectiveness have emerged as critical and central to educational reform. Internationally, education systems have responded variously and vigorously with agendas such as the USA's *No Child Left Behind* initiative and state by state programs in Canada such as the

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through the lens of recent research studies to provide insights into and opportunities for teacher-librarians to lead learning through the school library. A focus on collaboration, reflective action and learning rests of several important assumptions that are fundamental to the leading of learning: teacher-librarians read research about teaching and learning, and incorporate findings of this research into their instructional practices; teacher-librarians engage in teaching, and the teaching-instructional role is a clearly evident phenomena in their schools; teacher-librarians have a strong and positive collaborative relationship with classroom teachers and are partner leaders in implementing curriculum goals; teacher-librarians clearly articulate their learning leadership in terms of learning outcomes in terms of the growth of knowledge and understanding; higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem-solving and technology skills. For some teacher-librarians, working on these central assumptions might be some initial steps to quality pedagogy.

Leading of learning through collaboration and partnerships

In a broader societal trend towards the development of community, team work, and partner leadership, collaboration is increasingly posited as an approach to engaging school communities in educational reform. The concept of collaboration is not new to teacher-librarians, emerging in the early 1980s (for example, Loertscher 1982) as a basis for the instructional planning and integration of information literacy standards into curriculum content. Montien-Overall (2005) posits that collaborators not only '...plan, decide and act jointly; they also think together, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks.' In relation to teacher-librarians, Montien-Overall argues that there is a lack of consensus

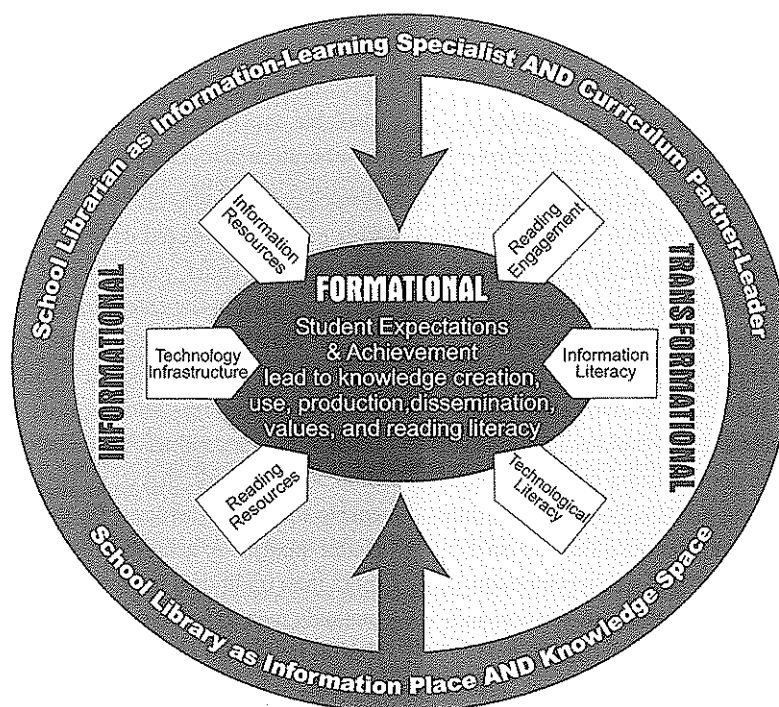
as to what it is, and there is also a limited understanding of the process of collaboration that enables effective and quality pedagogy for the school library.

These questions are all based on the assumption that teacher-librarians actually do collaborate with classroom teachers. Emerging research provides some evidence that this role of collaboration remains predominantly rhetoric, rather than mainstream reality. A recent study of 154 public school libraries in the US state of Delaware, (100% of all public school libraries in the state) undertaken by Todd (2005) suggests that levels of collaboration are very low. This study, undertaken from October 2004 to February 2005 on behalf of the Governor's Task Force on School Libraries in Delaware, was a comprehensive web based survey that collected data regarding the informational, transformational and formational dynamics of the school library. The conceptual framework used for structuring the survey instrument was based on the *Model of the school library as a dynamic agent of learning*, developed by Todd and Kuhlthau (2004). This model was developed

from the *Student learning through Ohio school libraries* study undertaken in 2003 across Ohio. The model posits that as a dynamic agent of learning, a school library's intellectual and physical infrastructure centers on three essential interactive and iterative components: *informational* (the information resource and information technology infrastructure); *transformational* (the instructional interventions and student engagement initiatives), and *formational* (learning impacts and student outcomes). These components are shown in the model below.

Accordingly, the physical and personnel infrastructure of the school library were collected: data related to staffing levels, resource levels, information technology infrastructure, and fiscal support levels, as well as data on the nature of their instructional role, their information literacy initiatives, collaborations, reading support initiatives, and perceptions of the impact of the school library's role on student achievement.

Specifically in relation to partnerships, the teacher-librarians in Delaware were asked to identify the nature of and extent of their instructional



Model of the school library as a dynamic agent of learning.

involvement in relation to English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science and Mathematics. The following categories were used in this study to identify the level of interaction:

- *Cooperation*: the teacher and the teacher-librarian may communicate informally about a short term project but work independently
- *Coordination*: the teacher and teacher-librarian may meet together to discuss a lesson/unit of study. The individual goal setting, learning experience design, teaching, and evaluation are done independently
- *Collaboration*: the teacher and teacher-librarian jointly set goals, design learning experiences, teach and evaluate a comprehensive unit of study.

This study found that cooperations were the predominant mode of teacher-librarians' interaction with the school community. A considerable number of cooperations take place in English Language Arts, Social Studies and Science and typically these are more than once-off events, with a number of schools engaged in multiple cooperations. It was in the Mathematics area where the highest numbers of no cooperations were recorded (66 school recording no activity here). 15.5% of primary teacher-librarians did not appear to engage in any form of cooperation.

The data on the number of coordinations indicated that a significant group of teacher-librarians did not engage in any level of formal (as opposed to the more informal) interactions with teaching faculty in relation to curriculum activities that involve the library. Specifically, 28.5% of teacher-librarians had no coordinations in English Language Arts, 32.5% of teacher-librarians had no coordinations in Social Studies, 39.6% of teacher-librarians had no coordinations in Science, and 75.3% of teacher-librarians had no coordinations in Mathematics. Teacher-librarians who were involved in

coordinations typically had between one and five coordinations per year, with a small number of school libraries with over 20 coordinations per year.

Compared to the number of cooperations and coordinations, the number of collaborations, where the teacher and teacher-librarians jointly set goals, design learning experiences, teach and evaluate a comprehensive unit of study, was low. 60% of teacher-librarians did not engage in formal collaborations to integrate information literacy into the English curriculum, and considerably higher percentages in the other curriculum areas identified in this study. At the same time, there was a small group of teacher-librarians who did engage in an extensive number of formal collaborations. While a crosstabulation analysis with availability of certified teacher-librarians and full time staff indicate that these aspects might be a possible explanation for the low levels in primary schools, it does not provide a plausible explanation for this gap in middle and high schools.

Callison's findings of surveys of teacher-librarians in Indiana show similar results (2005). 48% of high schools, 44% of middle schools and 25% of elementary schools reported that some teachers and the school librarian collaboratively plan and teach curriculum units. Overall, available data show that the concept of collaboration is more espoused than practised by teacher-librarians.

Collaboration is a vexed issue in the school library arena, with concerns not just in relation to the extent to which teacher-librarians engage in meaningful instructional partnerships, but broader pedagogical concerns, such as: do teacher-librarian and teacher collaborations actually work, that is, do they enable students to achieve? Do they enable students to achieve better and/or more than traditional instructional methods such as isolated library lessons not linked to curriculum content? What is the nature of the achievement enabled by teacher and

teacher-librarian and teacher collaborations? Is collaboration the most appropriate mode of instructional intervention? Should teacher-librarians focus on the individual and small group help rather than class room collaborations? What are the key pedagogical processes that underpin the design and implementation of successful collaborations? In addition, little research has also explored one of the fundamental assumptions underpinning teacher and teacher-librarian collaborations, that is, that classroom teachers actually want to collaborate with teacher-librarians, and actually endorse the mutual planning, design, implementation and evaluation of instructional interventions. These are critical questions that teacher-librarians will need to address so that the school library, as an essential component of the information age school, is not overlooked in major reform initiatives.

The leading of learning and experimenting with practice

Consistent with the current focus of quality pedagogies frameworks, the starting point is teacher-librarian pedagogy and teacher-librarian effectiveness. In the context of educational leadership and school libraries, the critical question is: What constitutes effective shared pedagogy that enables learning outcomes? According to Harada (2005), the individual practitioner, whether teacher or teacher-librarian, must be at the center of the reform effort, and change must take place in teaching behaviours to bring about change in learning outcomes. At the outset, this involves reflective practice, and experimenting with practice. According to Harada, the starting point of collaboration is not so much the teacher determining the curriculum content to be taught, and the teacher-librarian determining the information literacy skills to be developed and these two endeavours being somehow merged together; rather, the starting point is the identification of a learning need in the

context of knowledge, skill and attitudinal outcomes to be desired, and the teaching partners adopting a research stance of defining the problem or situation to be addressed; selecting appropriate interventions; identifying techniques for data collection; implement the planning-action-evaluation cycle akin to action research, and evaluating the result, in both refining pedagogy and instructional interventions, and in charting the learning outcomes.

Harada (2005) asserts that there must be a learning centred catalyst for collaboration. In her research, these included: students' lack of understanding of research as a process which impeded their development of curriculum knowledge, improving the power of journal writing as a means of cognitive and affective expressions of learning outcomes; engaging upper primary students in problem based inquiry. Each of these catalysts provided the basis for designing creative interventions and developing ways of charting improvements in learning, and reflecting on the efficacy of the interventions in relation to learning outcomes gained. In her research with teachers and teacher-librarians, Harada found that the spiraling cycles of action and reflection formed core of collaborative inquiry. This cyclic process of experimentation and reflective action enabled the teaching partnerships to think and act together and refine their teaching process. It enabled them to combining independent conceptual schemes of information literacy and curriculum standards to create original frameworks for improving learning outcomes. For example, the teams found that the combination of guided practice and feedback and conferencing, use of *Think aloud* technique, the co-construction of rubrics for notes and products, the need for debriefing sessions following new learning experiences, and student-generated questions form the core of inquiry. In essence, instead of collaboration being

a role based (ie. teacher and teacher-librarian) initiative, it was partner leaders leading learning initiative.

In the context of leading of learning, action research represents a key educational framework for collaborative partnerships to plan, develop, implement and evaluate collaborative inquiry. Action research pursues action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time. In most of its forms it does this by using a cyclic or spiral process which alternates between action and critical reflection and in the later cycles, continuously refining methods, evidence and interpretation in the light of the understanding developed in the earlier cycles. Action research by teachers and teacher-librarians focuses on the question: *How can I help my students improve the quality of their learning?* As Harada has identified, engaging in action research arises out of specific concerns related to student learning outcomes, and typically engages in the

following steps: 1. developing a plan to investigate the concern; 2. implement actions or strategies to improve learning outcomes; 3. observing and recording evidence of actions; 4. reflecting on outcomes; 5. developing an ongoing cycle of planning informed by the evidence (Hopkins, 1985). By its very nature, action research is responsive, interactive, constructive, experiential, reflective, systematic, and outcomes oriented: all key concepts underpinning the NSW *Quality Teaching* model. In essence, a commitment to *Quality Teaching*, evidence and learning outcomes direct the cycle of experimentation, action and reflection that underpins action research. In doing so, a cycle of personal, collective and organisational renewal takes place, and brings the school library more clearly into school wide reform and continuous improvement agendas.

[Editor's note: this research article will be continued in the November issue of *Scan*]

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